

Pertussis on the Rise in Utah

New Pertussis Vaccines Available for Teens and Adults

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utah doctors have reported nearly three times more pertussis (whooping cough) cases in 2005 than this time last year. Fortunately, two new vaccines are now available which officials hope will reduce the spread of pertussis, especially among adolescents.

By the end of September, 431 cases of pertussis had been reported to the Utah Department of Health (UDOH). By contrast only 138 cases of the disease were reported during the same time in 2004. Officials say the jump may be partly due to increased testing for pertussis, but it may also indicate a real increase in disease. More than half (54%) of the cases reported in 2005 were under 18 years of age.

Pertussis cases have been reported from 16 separate counties in Utah. “The trend we are seeing in Utah is very similar to the national trend,” says Robert Rolfs, M.D., State Epidemiologist, UDOH. “Pertussis is on the rise among adolescents and older adults. These groups have little or no immunity against pertussis. They often don’t recognize they have pertussis if they get it and can spread the disease to infants.”

Two new vaccines should give prevention efforts a boost because they are the first pertussis vaccines to immunize people over seven years of age. The immunity provided by vaccination against pertussis during childhood declines over time. That means most adolescents and adults are susceptible to pertussis. Teens and adults who get pertussis can give the disease to infants who are too young to have been fully vaccinated. Infants are also at highest risk of developing severe disease. Of the 25 pertussis-related hospitalizations in Utah this year, 18 were children under two years of age.

Page 2 of 2 – Adolescent Pertussis on the Rise in Utah

In May 2005, Boostrix, a Tetanus, Diphtheria, and acellular Pertussis (Tdap) vaccine, was licensed for use in individuals 10-18 years of age. In June 2005, Adacel, a second Tdap vaccine, was licensed for individuals 11-64 years of age.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) issued recommendations in June 2005 for the new Tdap vaccines, targeting adolescents as one of the primary groups for vaccination. The UDOH endorses the following recommendations:

- Adolescents 11 and 12 years of age should be given Tdap vaccine in place of the tetanus-diphtheria (Td) booster.
- Tdap vaccine should be given to adolescents 13 through 18 years of age who missed the Td dose at 11 to 12 years.
- Adolescents 11 to 18 years of age who have already been vaccinated with Td are encouraged to receive a dose of Tdap to further protect against pertussis

The UDOH encourages health care providers to vaccinate adolescents with the Tdap vaccine and reminds parents to vaccinate infants on time. Infants typically get the Diphtheria/Tetanus/Pertussis (DTaP) vaccine at 2, 4, 6 and 12 months of age. “In the wake of declining immunization levels among Utah’s two-year-olds and increasing pertussis cases, it is especially important to vaccinate infants on time,” says Linda Abel, Manager, Utah Immunization Program, UDOH.

Pertussis is a bacterial disease that is spread by having close contact with infected persons who may also be coughing or sneezing. Pertussis can cause serious illness, especially in infants. Symptoms include violent coughing spasms, loss of breath, can lead to pneumonia, and may induce vomiting. Hospitalizations are quite rare in adults, however they may experience prolonged illness and experience significant loss of work time.

For more information on pertussis or pertussis vaccines, contact your health care provider, public health department, or the Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659. For additional information, contact the National Immunization Program at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vaccine/tdap/default.htm>

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